

## TIP #3: TRAVELING SAFELY WITH PRESCHOOL & SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

A child should stay in a child safety seat with a full harness as long as possible, until about 4 years old. If the child's shoulders are above the top set of harness slots, a combination child seat/booster seat with higher harness slots is a good choice.



- A child over 4 years old may be ready for a booster seat. Booster seats make the vehicle's lap and shoulder belt fit properly. They keep the lap belt from causing injury to the child's abdomen and keep the shoulder belt in place to give the child upper body protection.
- Some younger children may outgrow the weight limit of their child safety seat with a harness and may not be ready to stay seated properly in a booster seat. Look for a child restraint with a higher weight limit.
- All children who have outgrown child safety seats should be properly restrained in booster seats until they are at least 8 years old, unless they are 4' 9" tall. Always make sure the child fits the adult safety belt properly.

### SAFETY RESTRAINTS FOR OLDER CHILDREN



- **Backless belt-positioning booster seats (A).** Use the vehicle lap and shoulder belt and provide good belt fit on the child. Some older types may come with a removable shield; remove the shield and use the seat with the vehicle lap and shoulder belt.
- **High-back belt-positioning booster seats (B).** Use the vehicle lap and shoulder belt. Some are combination child seat/booster seats with a removable harness (C). They can be used with the harness for a younger child under 40 pounds and then as a belt-positioning booster seat for an older child.
- **Specialized restraints** include child safety seats with harness labeled for use over 40 pounds, and other harness or shield type restraints. Check for a label stating seat meets federal safety standards. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions.

### CHOOSING THE RIGHT RESTRAINT FOR THE CHILD AND VEHICLE



- A belt-positioning booster seat (A or B) is the best choice if the car has combination lap and shoulder belts in the rear seat, and the child has outgrown the forward facing seat.
- If the child's ears come above the top of the vehicle seat, use a booster seat with a high back to improve neck protection (B). A specialized restraint may also be an option.
- A combination child seat/booster seat with a removable harness (C) may fit a child from **OVER** age 1 to age 8 or more. Check the label for the weight limit on the harness.
- If the vehicle only has lap belts it's safer for a child to use a lap belt than to ride without any restraint. Be sure to keep the lap belt low and snug across the thighs. If the lap belt rides up on the stomach it could cause serious injuries in a crash. Other options could include having shoulder belts installed.

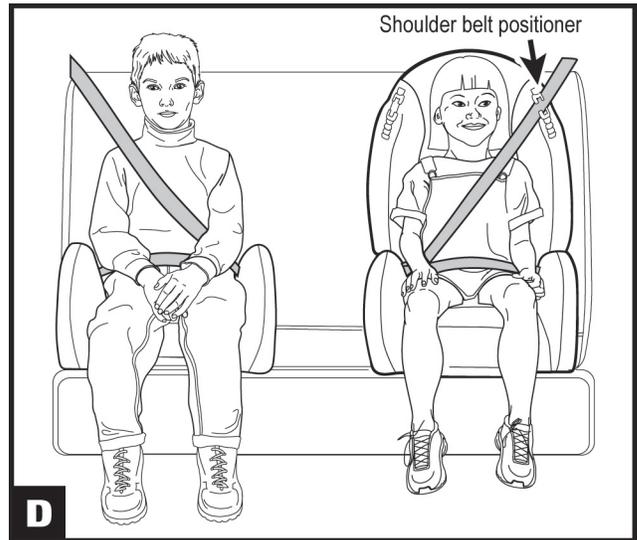
**Warning:** Devices advertised to improve belt fit for older children and adults are presently not covered by government standards. These products are not recommended. They may help with shoulder belt comfort, but may put too much slack in the shoulder belt or cause the lap belt to ride up. **Belt-positioning booster seats are the best solution for children who don't fit the adult safety belt.**

## WHY USE A BOOSTER SEAT INSTEAD OF AN ADULT SAFETY BELT?

- Safety belts were designed for adults. Until age 8, most children have not developed strong hipbones, and their legs and body are too short to allow for proper fit of a safety belt.
- Many young children do not sit still enough or straight enough to keep lap belts low across their thighs. A belt that rides up on the tummy could cause serious internal injuries.
- Booster seats are comfortable for children because they allow their legs to bend normally, and they enjoy being able to see out of the window.

## USING A BELT-POSITIONING BOOSTER SEAT (D)

- Place the booster seat flat on vehicle seat.
- Sit the child on the booster seat, place the lap and shoulder belt over the child and buckle the safety belt.
- Adjust the lap belt so it lays snugly across child's upper thighs, not across the tummy.
- Adjust the shoulder belt and thread through shoulder belt positioner (if available) so that shoulder belt lays snugly across the center of the child's shoulder. Check safety belt fit often.
- Buckle the booster seat in even when the child is not in it. A loose booster seat can injure others in a crash.



## WHEN IS A CHILD READY FOR THE ADULT SAFETY BELT?

- To be able to fit a safety belt, a child must:
  - Be tall enough to sit without slouching,
  - Keep his/her back against the vehicle seat back,
  - Keep his/her knees completely bent over the edge of the seat,
  - Keep his/her feet flat on the floor, and
  - Be able to stay comfortably seated this way.
- The lap belt must fit low and tight across the upper thighs. The shoulder belt should rest over the center of the shoulder and across the chest (E).
- **NEVER** put the shoulder belt under the child's arm or behind the child's back. This can cause severe head injuries or internal injuries in a crash. If the safety belt does not fit properly the child should use a belt-positioning booster seat.
- Always check belt fit on the child in every vehicle. A belt-positioning booster seat may be needed in some vehicles and not in others.

**ALWAYS read and follow the child safety seat instructions and the vehicle owner's manual!**